

## N E W S R E L E A S E

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### **STEVIE WONDER HONORED AT 25th ANNUAL MEDIA ACCESS AWARDS** *Awards Celebrate Representation of Disabilities in the Media and Entertainment Industries*

**UNIVERSAL CITY** – Hollywood entertainers, including Grammy-Award-winning singer/songwriter Stevie Wonder, joined in celebrating 25 years of progress for people with disabilities at the 25th Annual Media Access Awards Sunday evening at Universal Studios' Globe Theatre. Among those recognized with special awards were actors, entertainers, directors, producers, writers, casting agents, and pioneers of the Media Access mission.

This is the silver anniversary for the Media Access Awards program, which honors those in the entertainment industry who include and accurately portray people with disabilities in their productions. The awards are presented by the California Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities and also celebrate the many accomplishments of professionals with disabilities who have opened doors and opened eyes to an often untapped resource of talent.

In a message to the audience, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger commended the award recipients. "I congratulate all those being honored tonight for their exemplary efforts. They have done a fantastic job in helping ensure that people with disabilities are fully represented and recognized in the media and entertainment industries."

Singer/songwriter **Stevie Wonder** was honored with the Governor's Award of Excellence, which recognizes an outstanding contribution of state or nationwide impact in promoting awareness and dignity for people with disabilities. Wonder was honored for working tirelessly for social justice and serving as an inspiring role model for people with disabilities.

**Norman Lear** and **Fern Field** were honored with The Pioneer in Disability Inclusion Award, while the Media Access Visionary Award was presented to television executive **Loreen Arbus** and media consultant **Tari Hartman Squire**. Lear has been a leader in accurately depicting people with disabilities in his productions and was the first producer to hire a performer with a disability as a recurring character on a TV series, *The Facts of Life*. Television producer/writer/director Field created the Media Access Awards and Media Access Office, a year-round resource to the entertainment industry and professionals with disabilities. Squire was also a co-founder of the Media Access Office and together with Arbus helped catapult the notion of disability as part of diversity into the industry consciousness.

**Anthony E. Zuiker**, executive producer/writer of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*; *CSI: Miami*; and *CSI: NY*, was honored with the Media Access Producers Award. Zuiker was a supporter of the casting of two *CSI* series regulars portrayed by actors with disabilities, and many series storylines have accurately and sensitively portrayed people with disabilities.

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**Jim Troesh** received the Michael Landon Award. Troesh is an accomplished actor/writer best known for his role as a quadriplegic attorney on *Highway to Heaven* and now hosts his own podcast series.

**Daryl "Chill" Mitchell** received the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Harold Russell Award. The actor, paralyzed from the waist down in a 2001 accident, has enjoyed film and television success including recurring roles on shows like *Ed* and *Veronica's Closet*.

**Linda Bove** and **Karen Meyer** received the American Federation of Television and Radio Artist's (AFTRA) Disability Awareness Award. Bove, an actress who is deaf, has a long list of credits, including her long-held role as Linda the Librarian on PBS's *Sesame Street*. Meyer, an ABC News reporter in Chicago who is deaf, produces segments and advises corporations on hiring people with disabilities.

**John Levey**, past vice president for casting for Warner Bros, was honored with the Casting Society of America Award. Levey has created successful roles for people with disabilities on popular TV shows such as *ER*, *The West Wing*, *Third Watch*, *China Beach*, and *Life Goes On*.

A number of films and television programs and their producers also were honored for their inclusion and accurate portrayals of characters with disabilities. Honored movies included ***Music Within***; ***Notes on a Scandal***, and the documentary film ***Twisted***. Honored television programs included ABC's ***Boston Legal***, ***Dancing with the Stars***, and ***Extreme Makeover***; CBS's ***CSI: NY***; NBC's ***Friday Night Lights***; HBO's ***Extras***; Disney Channel's ***Handy Manny***; and ***Entertainment Tonight***.

A special recognition award was presented to ABC's ***To Iraq and Back: Bob Woodruff Reports***. Seriously wounded while covering the war in Iraq, Woodruff works to improve the lives of people with disabilities as he continues recovering from a traumatic brain injury. Walt Disney Theme Parks' ***Signs*** TV commercial, which shows a boy using sign language to share his experiences at Disneyland with his hearing-impaired grandfather, also received a special recognition award.

Celebrity presenters for the evening included **Marlee Matlin**, **CSI's Robert David Hall**, **My Name is Earl's Tracy Ashton**, **Vegas' Grant Albrecht**, **Boston Legal's Meredith Eaton-Gilden**, **Eve's Jason George**, comedienne **Geri Jewell** and **Kathy Buckley**, **Mindy Sterling**, **Joey Travolta**, and many others.

While studies vary greatly due to how disability is defined, there is an identified employment gap between people with and without disabilities. According to the 2005 Cornell University Disability Status Report, the California employment rate of working-age people with a disability was 37.4 percent, as compared to 75.7 percent employment rate for those without a disability. A Screen Actors Guild report released in 2005 on the employment of performers with disabilities in the entertainment industry stated that less than 2 percent of TV show characters display a disability and only 0.5 percent have speaking roles.

The Media Access Awards were established in 1979 by the California Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (CGCEPD) and producer Fern Field. They seek to increase the inclusion of disability in what we see and hear, and to raise public awareness, understanding and acceptance.

Entertainment and media industry professionals, working with the Governor's Committee, established the Media Access Office (MAO) in 1980, which provides casting services, classes, and workshops that build competitive skills and offer career guidance to persons with disabilities. The MAO is a unique partnership of volunteers, industry professionals, and staff of the California Employment Development Department.

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